

# **The Appropriate Contaminants**

A Poetic Attempt By  
Cory Piña

2006

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For my dad.

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## Beginning

Before I started this sentence  
the page was blank.

It was waiting for me to fill  
it with meaningful metaphors,

insights about my surroundings,  
and poetic chat regarding

my thoughts and emotions.  
But this is all I could conjure:

the acknowledgment that previous  
to the first line,

the page contained  
no words.

## Breath of God

I wonder where it is now, the one He gave  
Adam, who most humanly exhaled it back  
into the days-old atmosphere. Did it  
dissolve into millions of pieces – atoms  
spreading themselves throughout, carrying

the divine essence? Or it is still out there?  
A great breath of heaven, moving  
constantly between you and me, in and out  
of our lungs, causing us to pause, taking  
note of the extraordinary breath we've just taken.

## Listening To A Storm

Already today I have thought –  
at various intervals –  
on the subject of the Earth's rotation,  
wondering specifically about what  
would happen were it to cease.

Would we all keep moving,  
caught in the momentum of  
thousands or millions of  
years worth of spinning,  
sprung forward in the direction we've

been moving all along, so that  
my home here in California might  
lie somewhere in the Old World along  
precisely the same latitude.  
Or might it be a tremendous pause –

like when your heart skips a beat –  
and the world begins moving in  
the opposite direction,  
as if to establish a much needed  
sense of balance.

In any case, this wind  
seems determined enough to knock  
us off our orbit, meaning tomorrow  
will be a bit cooler –  
or warmer – depending on its direction.

## Face Down

"I'll fall face down" he sang,  
while I laid with my nose  
buried into my blue sweatshirt.

And I asked you what I needed,  
to which you replied, "Me."  
And of course I already knew.  
Which is why I sighed  
in agreement.

And as the music grew  
louder and more powerful  
I turned my head as if  
to sleep and breathed  
clearer than I had in weeks.

I ran my fingers through the  
dirt left on the floor by  
our November boots, making  
lines and circles,  
untroubled, like a child  
lying carefree with  
his head buried in the  
chest of his father.

And now that the music has finished,  
I don't want to get up.  
I just want you to put me  
to bed, and if you could,

if it's not too much trouble,  
hold my hand until I fall asleep.



## Hair Cut

When I was feeling sick I  
became uncomfortable with  
the length of my hair,  
and so I was determined to  
chop it off as though the pain  
and discomfort were being housed  
somewhere inside my blond locks.

Later on – my hair shorter  
and body still ailing –  
I imagined trimming myself  
away until I could find  
the root of the problem;  
the part of me which  
required pruning.

First would go the rest of  
my hair – eyebrows, beard, etc.  
Then limb by limb would be  
removed until I had cut  
away the pain,  
leaving the remainder of  
my body – if anything  
remained – free from discomfort,  
in its purest form.

## Imagination

Today after my deli sandwich I sat down to  
write without inspiration, without reason, or  
purpose other than filling a page with words.

So while I wait for this poem to appear,  
please imagine that before you lies  
a poetic masterpiece,

a literary work of art filled with clear and  
beautiful images. Its attitude and tone move you  
deeply and you simply cannot wait to share

it with your friends – the ones you know  
appreciate a well manufactured piece of literature.  
Like this one.

## Cell

I woke up looking out the window of  
our small bedroom, across which crept the blinds,  
looking like sideways prison bars. But I didn't feel  
imprisoned. Our cell was nicely outfitted  
with a comfortable queen bed

lined with soft sheets, and near my  
stomach was a ball the color and size of our cat.  
But now I'm sitting at this window, where the cat-sized  
ball is curled up in my lap.  
I'm here, thinking about our cell  
and it's beautiful wooden walls upon which

Rockwell's couple are  
forever signing their marriage license.  
Around them are the signatures of our own  
friends – the ones who watched us marry. And you're  
still sleeping, soon to wake up within our cell, in  
which we are so delighted to be locked up together.

## Refuge

In a coffee shop below Yosemite  
an employee apologized  
for the splash of my latte which had found  
its way upon the lid.

But I didn't mind.  
If anything I pitied the spicy milk  
that remained within my cup,  
doomed for consumption,  
whose brothers and sisters  
had found refuge in the  
sunken ring embedded in  
the plastic cup that then  
housed my iced chai –  
two dollars and seventy-five cents.

## I am Jacob

I am Jacob.

I have deceived my own.

I have lied to my father,  
and stolen from my brother.

I have loved one and hated another.

I am a runaway and a coward.

One day soon, I will be Israel.

## On Changing Colors

We should wonder if trees  
enjoy changing colors  
as much as we enjoy watching them?  
It must be a sudden relief to  
be released from a life of

green and into the world of  
yellows and reds;  
set free from being like the rest of their  
verdured brothers and sisters,  
and finally to undress  
altogether, relieved from  
their burden of leaves,

dropping them to earth, finally  
standing naked and  
unveiling what they had kept  
concealed for so long.

## Scent

The mountains welcomed  
me back with a soft breeze  
and the aroma of pine –

a scent that will quickly  
evade my senses once  
I've been here long enough.

Already I've begun to grow  
accustomed to its beauty  
and the depth of its fragrance.

My only hope is to leave again,  
and to return after I've  
inhaled the appropriate contaminants.

## Poet

I was not surprised, as I sat in a bookstore  
reading Billy Collins describe his opinion

of Edward Hopper, to look up and see a copy  
of Hopper's works, colorful, dark, and still, sitting

in front of me. Billy seems to know where  
I am when I read his words – like a distant, poetic, bald

Santa Claus paying attention to my every move,  
reading my lips, and peering out through my eyes.



## Presence

When you asked Jesus to fill every nook and cranny of this room with his presence, I imagined him first coming down through the heater vents in the ceiling. Settling at the bottom, he crept

into the tiny spaces between each loop of carpet, filling the room. As the level of his being raised steadily to the height of our heads we began breathing him deeply into the crevices of

our lungs as we watched him work his way into the grooves along the wall panels and the edges of each rock in the mantle. And not only did I watch him fill the gap of this journal, held

open by it's thin ribbon of a bookmark, but he also snuck his way between the rows of horizontal blinds, pressing himself up against the glass. And before he reached the peak of

the ceiling, I noticed he had wiggled his way into my ear canals, where I hope he will remain, keeping me balanced, as I swim steadily around in this pool of his presence.

## Rick

The day Rick died the world lost two degrees,  
though education never did him well.  
Instead he walked the streets and asked for change.

He said to me he's always soared in math,  
And I believed Rick's academic claims,  
though he had trouble adding to his fold.

He told me he was born up in Alaska.  
"The weather there was never quite my thing,"  
he said, then took a bite of his burrito.

I stood to leave, and Rick look up with "thank you."  
He took another sip of lemonade.  
The highlight of Rick's week: he ate that day.

## Personals

Keiko  
Female, Japanese  
Attractive Personality  
Seeking someone for conversation.  
Flagstaff, Arizona

Mel  
Homeless White Male  
Seeking roof, job, and food  
Pasadena, CA

Erica, 36  
Confused Caucasian Female  
Seeking "Someone Real"  
Loves long drives and laughing.  
Pawling, NY

Ernesto  
Abandoned Child, 3-Years-Old  
Son of drug abusers.  
Seeking life, food, parents, and medical attention

Jason, 38  
Indianapolis, IN  
Brown Hair, 5'11"  
Master Of Business Administration  
\$70,000/year, Sales and Marketing  
Seeking

Julianne, 27, Leo  
Uncertain Of The Future  
Seeking guidance in the wrong places.  
Circle Pines, MN

Nathan, 17  
High School Male  
Seeking to be appreciated and accepted.  
Pacific Grove, CA

## Untrained Eye

Funny to think Jesus is  
in this McDonald's.  
I don't see him here.  
But sometimes I think  
I really don't know  
what to look for.



## About This Guy



Cory Piña was born and raised in Monterey, California. He graduated from Monterey High School in 1999, while developing an uncanny ability to parallel park golf carts.

After graduating from Azusa Pacific University with a degree in something, he began a full time position at Calvin Crest Conferences in Oakhurst, California, where he currently lives and works with his wife Lyndsay, and their cat, "Kitty 3."

Do you like  
my poems?  
check yes  
or no

☐ yes

☐ no